

## Epiphany 4B (1/29/12 – *The Authority of the Holy One of God*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

We listen to all sorts of false authoritative teaching. We receive burst emails from family, friends, and spammers inciting us to take urgent action to protect our name, our values, or our way of life. It seems real ... and authoritative. They use the right words. They pluck at our heart stings in just the right way to convince us that the threat is real. But then we turn to another authoritative source – the internet – and find out that the content was inaccurate ... false information ... an urban legend. Whom do we believe?

Although among the younger members of society they are a fading influence, news and newspapers claim to give us authoritative teachings – about people and events. We listen. We run off and tell our friends and neighbors this or that – as if we were true. Then a few days or weeks later, we find that they quoted their sources out of context – making them seem to say the exact opposite of what they actually said. Later we find out that the source gave them misinformation. We thought it was objective, factual reporting – the unadulterated truth. But now we find that it was false reporting ... false teaching. Whom do we believe?

Of course, this does not happen in the secular world only. Many religions claim to teach the truth. Many denominations claim to base all of their teaching and practice on the Bible. Many preachers claim that they faithfully proclaim God's Word. However, their teachings do not agree – maybe in some basics and generalities ... but not in all parts. Whom do we believe?

The Jewish teachers – the Rabbis – taught by quoting previous, recognized authorities. As an illustration, I will use a few examples from the humorous *Hermeneutics of the Stop Sign*. “R. Meir says: He who does not stop shall not live long. R. Hillel says: Cursed is he who does not count to three before proceeding. R. Shimon ben Yehudah says: Why three? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. R. ben Yitzhak says: And because of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

By Jesus' day, gone was the authoritative, ***Thus says the LORD***. Indeed, the

teaching had strayed so far from God's authority that one could say with the author of 1SAMUEL: ***The Word of the LORD was rare in those days*** [1SAM 3.1]. It is sadly rare in our lives, all too often – either by neglect ... or by disregard. We fail to hear God's Word. We hear God's Word but chose to ignore it. We go ahead and run headlong into sin anyway.

God's Holy Word tells us to ***take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak*** [1COR 8.9]. You dare not use your Christian liberty to cause your weaker brothers and sisters to stumble in their faith. Your flesh is bold to boast: "This is my right! I am doing nothing wrong!" In one context, that may be so. But if it means that your weaker brothers or sisters fall into sin because of it, well, ***if that makes my brother stumble, I will never do it again, lest I make my brother stumble*** [1COR 8.13].

And here is the importance of this – and every Word of God. Notice where our Lord Jesus Christ is. ***And immediately on the Sabbath***, says St. Mark, ***He entered the synagogue and was teaching*** [MK 1.21]. The incarnate Word went to the place where God's people were gathered to hear that Word. He Who is the Word according to His divinity went to **hear** the Word. There is no greater imprimatur – endorsement – of the importance and blessing of hearing God's Word – the Word we so readily neglect ... ignore ... disdain ... and disobey.

Christ our Lord received Holy Baptism even though He had no sins of His Own to wash away. In that act, His divinity was revealed as the Father spoke from heaven and the Holy Spirit remained on Him. Christ our Lord will not only institute but also partake of His Holy Communion. In this He reveals His divine nature – for only by His divinity can He give His Body and Blood on every altar for the forgiveness of sins. So likewise, Christ our dear Lord here goes and hears the preaching of His Word – then He Himself teaches Its true meaning. There is nothing as great as – nothing more important than – these divine Gifts of Word and Sacrament. Not only does God command us to hear and do His Word and receive His Gospel Gifts – He Himself also partakes of the same. By command, He compels us. By example, He encourages us. For in these heavenly Gifts are truth and forgiveness, cleansing and life, release and restoration to wholeness.

We do not hear in detail the content of Jesus' teaching – not in this place. But we know it. When John was imprisoned, Jesus began calling to repentance and faith. He began proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom present in Him ... the Kingdom in which sins are forgiven because the Son gives Himself up on the Cross in order to redeem the world.

What we know in this context is that Jesus *taught them as One Who had authority, and not as the scribes* [Mk 1.22]. In other words, Jesus did not cite earlier Rabbis to make His point. He did not need the corroboration of those who had gone before Him to prove the truth of His teaching. For in His teaching we see *The Authority of the Holy One of God*. He went straight to the source, as it were – for He was and is and ever shall be the Source of all true teaching ... indeed, of truth itself.

And this *astonished* His hearers. They were awe-struck. The original here even carries the sense of our modern phrase: *they were blown away* by His teaching. No nonsense. No “beating around the bush.” Jesus called to repentance and pointed people to the forgiveness of sins. It did not depend on them – but on the mercy of God.

He even healed on the Sabbath – as we will hear again next week. He cast out demons on the Sabbath. The Pharisees and scribes would consider this work. God rested on the Sabbath from all His work of creation. God set aside the Sabbath as a day of rest and commanded it to His people. Man cannot work on the Sabbath – even to show mercy, heal, and de-possess.

However, God had not ceased to work in every sense on the seventh day. He did not kick back on the divine sofa and sip lemon-aide or iced tea all day long. For He continued to sustain His creation – uphold it ... ensure that what He had called into being by His Word continued to be. In particular, our gracious God never ceases to work for our salvation – calling us to repentance and faith day in and day out ... by His Holy Word and Spirit.

Now if we thought our Savior's teaching showed authority already, our *Gospel* goes on to show the extent of that authority. For *immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,*

***“What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know Who You are — the Holy One of God.” And Jesus rebuked Him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.***

[Mk 1.23-26] Note – the devil cannot stand pure teaching. It disturbs him – unrests him. He will have nothing to do with the pure teaching of the Gospel. He cannot tolerate it. But before he will leave, he will attempt to twist and undo the truth that Jesus proclaimed.

***What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us?*** Christ comes only in goodness and mercy – not to judge, but to save. The evil one tries to twist His purpose before the eyes of the people. ***Have You come to destroy us?*** Well ... no! Jesus has not come to destroy the man ... only to cast out and destroy sin, death, and the devil. He will force out the unclean spirit. He will cleanse the man – make him whole again. If the unclean spirit had said, “Have You come to destroy me?” then Jesus would have declared emphatically, “Yes, indeed.” As it is, Jesus silences this teacher of lies. For even when he speaks the truth – ***I know Who You are—the Holy One of God*** – he does so only to try to pervert the truth and turn people to sin.

In the next chapter, Jesus will heal a paralytic. But His first words to him will be: ***Son, your sins are forgiven*** [Mk 2.5]. That is the authority of Christ – authority given Him by the Father. For Jesus is the Prophet Whom God raised up from among His brothers [DEU 18.18]. Christ not only speaks the Father’s Word, but also works the Father’s works – creating repentance and faith by His Word ... restoring and re-creating His creation ... forgiving sin and giving life.

And Christ our dear Lord continues the *epiphany* of His authoritative teaching **today** – in Word, Sacrament, and the Holy Absolution of the forgiveness of sins. Christ continues to cast out the unclean spirits of sin and unbelief ... as the Right Hand and Finger of God [ISA 41.10; LK 11.20]. **Today** Jesus has entered this gathering place of the people of God – the incarnate Word comes to declare to you the words of His Father. You are clean ... you are forgiven ... for the sake of Christ!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]